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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000442

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION ILL-PREPARED FOR CHERNOBYL
DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: 04 MINSK 472

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Minsk authorities granted the opposition permission to hold the Chernobylski Shliakh (The Chernobyl Path), a demonstration commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl power plant tragedy, on April 26. The Ten Plus Coalition is "organizing" the event, but the leadership has made few preparations and will not meet to devise a plan until April 24. Viktor Ivashkevich, a Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) member and demonstration planner for the Ten Plus, gave Poloff on April 21 vague details of the opposition's plans for Chernobylski Shliakh and confirmed the growing concern that the opposition suffers from lack of communication and organization. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Chernobylski Shliakh has typically been one of Belarus' largest annual demonstrations. According to independent online news source Belapan, 50,000 people gathered in downtown Minsk on the ten-year anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster in 1996. At the march, demonstrators overturned cars and clashed with police. Dozens were injured and over 200 people were arrested. In 2000, 20,000 people participated, in 2001 - 5,000 people, 2002 - 4,000 people, 2003 - 3,000 people, and in 2004 - 1,000 people. In 2005, a large OMON riot police and security service presence on October Square deterred many demonstrators and the event was subsequently cancelled (reftel). This year's demonstration will mark the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy.

GOB Sanctions Demonstration, But Has Terms

¶3. (U) On April 19, the Minsk City Executive Committee granted the Ten Plus Coalition permission to hold a 1,000-person demonstration in Minsk. However, the authorities refuse to allow a demonstration on October Square or a march on Independence Avenue to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Instead, the authorities insist the demonstration be at the NAS followed by a march to Bangalore Square on side streets away from the city's center.

No Preparation

¶4. (C) Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) member Viktor Ivashkevich admitted to Poloff on April 21 that although the Ten Plus was organizing the march, its leaders had not met to make preparations. Ivashkevich blamed the delay on the absent leadership that has been traveling abroad. However, the Ten Plus leadership plans to meet on April 24 to "negotiate" and "decide" on the demonstration's preparations.

15. (C) Ivashkevich said the Ten Plus would abide by the authorities' conditions and hold the Chernobylski Shliakh at NAS and by marching to Bangalore Square. He expected some demonstrators would gather at October Square, but someone from the Ten Plus leadership - possibly former candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, his campaign manager Sergey Kalyakin, or BPF leader Vintsuk Vyachorka - would be there to encourage demonstrators to move to NAS in order to avoid clashes with security forces.

16. (C) The march is expected to commence at 18:00, and at approximately 19:00, Milinkevich will speak to the demonstrators about the GOB's inadequate response to the Chernobyl accident and explain the opposition's strategy for the next year before leading demonstrators to Bangalore Square. Ivashkevich predicted the demonstration would end at 21:00.

Turnout Unknown

17. (C) The Ten Plus allegedly distributed in Minsk 200,000 leaflets advertising the demonstration, but is relying heavily on independent online news sources and newspapers to inform the public. Ivashkevich expects a turnout similar to the March 25 demonstration - approximately 7,000 people - because security services are less likely to interfere. Ivashkevich admitted that youth groups, unions, and other social organizations have not pledged to attend the ceremony, but he expects individual members of these groups to participate.

Intra-Party Squabbles

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18. (C) Ivashkevich admitted problems existed within the Ten Plus Coalition leadership, especially between the United Civic Party (UCP) leader Anatoly Lebedko and Milinkevich. Ivashkevich noted that several leaders believe they would have been better candidates than Milinkevich, but he does not believe the resulting personality clashes pose a serious threat to the unity of the coalition.
Krol